



Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

JB Pritzker, Governor

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STATE OF ILLINOIS WRAPS UP MONTHLONG SERIES OF EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS CELEBRATING NATIONAL BLACK BUSINESS MONTH

Series of events to raise awareness of issues facing Black-owned businesses and resources offered during COVID-19

CHICAGO – As National Black Business Month comes to a close, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today highlighted the results of a series of events and initiatives conducted throughout the month of August to honor the contributions of and address issues facing Black-owned businesses around the state. DCEO joined state partners as well as corporate partners to host over 18 events, engaging more than 2,000 Black business owners and entrepreneurs from around the state.

The month will conclude with a final event scheduled this Thursday, August 27th, with a workshop cohosted by Groupon and the Lieutenant Governor to draw attention to resources available for minority-owned businesses facing additional challenges due to COVID-19.

"Systemic racism has contributed to health and business inequities in the Black community for decades, but COVID-19 has taken these disparities to pandemic levels," **said Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton.** "According to Forbes Magazine, nearly 41% of Black businesses closed during COVID as compared to 17% of white businesses. This staggering number is reflective of the lack of banking relationships and lending decisions across the country. Here in Illinois, we are fighting to change that narrative with state grants and programs that support and uplift Black entrepreneurs."

"Under Governor Pritzker's leadership, the State of Illinois is committed to fostering an inclusive business environment that will help our Black businesses compete and thrive," **said Acting Director of DCEO, Michael Negron.** "We know too well that the ongoing health crisis has placed new obstacles before our Black-owned businesses and entrepreneurs. That is why we have teamed up with public and private partners throughout the month of August to shine a light on the issues facing businesses today, and to call to action resources and support needed to help them compete and succeed during COVID-19 and beyond."

DCEO kicked off the month of August by launching a partnership with Illinois-headquartered, Groupon, to host a series of virtual panel discussions focused on assisting Black-owned businesses during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Panels hosted to date have focused on increasing capacity to grow revenue and enhance necessary credentials to successfully attract additional business customers.

“Throughout Illinois and across the country, Black Businesses contribute to the vibrancy and strength of communities everywhere – which is why Groupon has been proud to partner with the state of Illinois to honor them during the 2020 National Black Business Month,” **said Aaron Cooper, Interim CEO, Groupon.** “This year’s Black Business workshops have helped inspire an important dialogue around ways we can better support the success of Black-owned businesses of all types and address the unique issues they face. On behalf of the Groupon team and our merchants, I want to thank the Pritzker administration, businesses and industry organizations, community leaders, policymakers and hundreds of participants who’ve come to the table to support their empowerment.”

Groupon panels provided small business attendees access to successful entrepreneurs, corporate leaders and policymakers on the local, state and federal level. These panelists included representatives from the State of Illinois, local chambers of commerce, community development organizations and lenders, the BOSS Network, the U.S. Small Business Administration, Groupon, the National Urban League, and the Chicago Urban League. In addition to partnering with DCEO and Groupon on these events, the Chicago Urban League will serve as a technical assistance partner as DCEO expands outreach efforts to help additional Black and minority-owned businesses qualify for ongoing small business grants.

“The National Urban League is honored to partner with the State of Illinois and Groupon during National Black Business Month. Black Businesses have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and Civil Unrest, and it is critical that we double down on our commitment to supporting, growing, and cultivating Black Businesses,” **said Marc H. Morial, President and CEO, National Urban League.** “The National Urban League has been fighting on behalf of the Black Community economically for over 100 years, and we will continue to do so amidst this public health crisis and social crisis. We are proud to be collaborating with our affiliate, the Chicago Urban League, to reinforce the relief efforts of Governor Pritzker and his administration for Black Businesses.”

During Black Business month, DCEO highlighted several new initiatives launched in August. This includes the release of the first tranche of the Business Interruption Grant program, otherwise known as BIG, which has deployed over \$46 million to businesses across the state, with 50 percent of all funds being dedicated toward minority-owned businesses and companies.

In addition to offering a unique series of events, the Illinois Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) supported Black business development organizations across the state as they presented webinars and events to commemorate National Black Business Month. The team made virtual presentations for chamber groups such as the Nigerian Global Chamber of Commerce and the Metro Decatur Black Chamber, as well as the “Ladiworkz Black Women in Business Expo” in Rockford. OMEE has also played a crucial role in cultivating an ecosystem of support for Black Businesses in Illinois through its OMEE grant program. One of the recipients, the Black Chamber of Commerce of Illinois, will be cutting the ribbon for its new incubator on September 16th, in Decatur, Illinois.

“Through the support of the grant acquired from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Black Chamber of Commerce of Illinois has successfully implemented Central Illinois's newest incubator space, The INC Spot,” **said Anthony Corey Walker, President of Black Chambers of Commerce of Illinois and Co-Founder of The Inc Spot business incubator.** “This DCEO grant supports our new incubator in providing mentorship, resources, and space to develop and improve businesses of the minority community. Access to capital and ongoing training provided by the State of Illinois is essential to creating an ecosystem for Black owned businesses that will increase economic sustainability and boost access to business arenas which have historically seen limited minority participation.”

An estimated 145,000 businesses in Illinois, or 12 percent, are Black-owned, according to the most recent U.S. Census data. Recognizing that advancement of minority-owned businesses is essential to the growth of Illinois' economy, DCEO's Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) was created to assist minority entrepreneurs and minority-owned enterprises with resources needed to build, grow and flourish. OMEE works closely with industry organizations, chambers as well as one-on-one with businesses to provide professional guidance and support.

"I've found each of the webinars offered by the State of Illinois during Black Business Month extremely insightful," **said Darryl T. Jenkins, owner of The CPS (Creative Promotional Solutions) Store.** "The panelists brought a wealth of industry experience and knowledge that I believe will prove to be beneficial for myself and for other small business owners. With the support of DCEO and their OMEE team, I look forward to continued engagement opportunities that will create paths to business growth and sustainability."

"Business owners don't often get the opportunity to be in the company of experts in finance, contracting, marketing and strategic planning, especially now, when so much of our work is virtual," **said Kimberley Rudd, President of Rudd Resources LLC in Chicago.** "The DCEO webinars held for National Black Business Month gave us that opportunity. I was both a panelist and a participant, a talking head and a listening ear, you might say. I learned from and was motivated by my fellow panelists to not just persevere during this season but to plan and to strike, so that my business is poised for growth in 2021. I'm grateful for that opportunity."

"The programs being offered for Black Business Month provide a lot of clarity on things that businesses need to know to be successful. Especially as it relates to access to capital and credit," **said Britt Savage, Owner – Structure Group LLC.** "They spoke to the unique challenges Black businesses experience. All of the panelists seemed to be strong advocates for small businesses as well.",

The final 2020 Black Business Month event co-hosted by the State of Illinois and Groupon will feature a discussion on grants, loans and other resources Black Businesses can take advantage of on the state and federal level in order to rebuild damaged businesses post-civil unrest. This free discussion will take place on Thursday, August 27th at 2pm – registration is required in advance. You can register today by visiting DCEO's [website](#) or at [Groupon's event page](#).

For more on additional business assistance programs offered by DCEO, please visit [DCEO's website](#) or follow us on social at @IllinoisDCEO.

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